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Introduction

Chandbir

In March 2001, when we were walking around Nangal, a village in western Uttar Pradesh (UP), India, we met a man named Chandbir.¹ In his mid twenties in 2001, Chandbir came from a family belonging to the middle-ranking Jat caste and owning 4 acres of land. He possessed a high school pass but failed three times to obtain a position in the army. Some of Chandbir's friends teased him by promoting him within the army hierarchy every time he failed the examination, and they called him 'Captain Chandbir' in 2001.

Chandbir was keen to talk, and he led us over to a rope bed in his family's courtyard. We asked him how he regarded education in the light of his failure to obtain a salaried job. Perched on the edge of the rope bed, Chandbir leaned forward eagerly, and told us:

Education provides great benefit. Education allows one to obtain good employment, and, if you don't obtain a service job, you should still certainly study. An educated person can do any work or business. An educated person can also run a shop. In addition, education provides manners. An educated person can talk to anyone. Wherever you go, education provides confidence. Education is very important. . . . When I work in the field in the sun, my mind starts to whirl. I've realized that to get out of the dust and soil [*dhul mitti*] of the village people need to study. It's only by studying that they will escape.

There are many Chandbirs in Nangal. Growing enthusiasm for education is a marked feature of contemporary India. During fourteen months' ethno-

¹All names in the book are pseudonyms.

graphic field research in north India in 2000–2002, we heard many parents and young people telling us that prolonged education (*parhāi*) is central to children's futures. Like Chandbir, parents and young people discussed the benefits of education with reference to a range of skills and knowledge offered by schooling. They imagined education to provide a good job, manners and an escape from the 'dust and soil' of the village.

The physical landscape of Nangal village, Bijnor District, also testified to the importance of education in western UP. Driving into the village from the direction of the district town, Bijnor, one first encountered a large private secondary school: several whitewashed buildings clustered around an area of scuffed ground that served as a children's playground. Advertisements for private tutors, coaching institutes and textbooks surrounded the school compound. In the early mornings and late afternoons, children crowded this area dressed in colorful uniforms and clutching bulging school bags. Education also marked the landscape of Qaziwala, a Muslim-dominated village closer to Bijnor town. At the junction between the main road and the track to Qaziwala is a large madrasah, an Islamic educational institution, which in 2001 catered for over 1,200 pupils. Around 7 AM, and again at about noon, children poured in and out of the madrasah. At the same times, buses, cycle rickshaws and three-wheeled motorized vehicles plied the main road carrying richer children south-east to private schools in Bijnor and poorer children north-west to a government-aided secondary school.

Between September 2000 and April 2002, we lived in a middle class colony, Awasi Vikas, built mainly in the mid-1990s on the edge of Bijnor. The landscape surrounding our home was also replete with signs of a growing enthusiasm for formal education. A large advertising hoarding opposite the entrance to the colony proclaimed that 'Modern Era Public School,' a new English-Medium school in Bijnor, provides "every facility for the best education in India." From 5 AM every morning, teenaged children streamed into Awasi Vikas on bicycles and scooters to start private tutorials before school. By 7 AM, cycle rickshaws, typically carrying ten to fifteen carefully groomed schoolchildren, set off toward the numerous primary schools scattered around the town. Between Bijnor and Delhi, signs for educational institutions offering opulent and successful futures lined the road: schools promising children "the mind of an Athenian and the body of a Spartan," institutions dedicated to "giving your kids a head start in life" and multiple nurseries tailored to "the exceptionally gifted child."

We encountered similar narratives of education as social opportunity in the seminar rooms of Delhi. Scholars often referred to mainstream schooling as a basis for individual ‘empowerment’ and a wellspring for social and political transformation. Development workers in organizations such as the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank spoke in similar terms.

Such perceptions are part of general understandings of the significance of education in contemporary India. Indeed, more than half of President Abdul Kalam’s address to the nation on 14 August 2004 was devoted to emphasizing the importance of the education system “in creating an enlightened, dynamic and prosperous society” and transforming “a human being into a wholesome whole, a noble soul and an asset to the universe.”² From the sugar cane fields of rural Bijnor district, through the offices of provincial western UP and onwards along the road to Delhi, development planners, businesspeople and parents depicted education as a tool for personal and collective development.

The idea of education as a central ‘social good’ has a long history in UP (see Kumar 1994). It occupied a prominent place in the imagination of the founders of post-colonial India (Kumar 1994). Nor is it surprising that we encountered, in the seminar rooms of Delhi, development workers and scholars speaking in rich tones of the benefits of education. Not only do these development workers and scholars have a powerful professional stake in education, as teachers or people engaged in introducing educational initiatives, but they have also gained personally from sustained formal schooling and university degrees, as, indeed, we have ourselves.

At a theoretical level, the narratives and landscapes we encountered in north India remind us of Drèze and Sen’s (1995) insistence on education as ‘social opportunity.’ In his work, *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) writes of education as a key tool of individual and social transformation intimately connected to people’s ability to obtain a range of ‘substantive freedoms,’ such as employment, political participation and dignity.

This book highlights the potential for education to transform people’s lives. But we also show how power and culture mediate people’s access to the freedoms that education provides. Rather than assuming that people from margin-

²Full details of his address are available at: <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/scripts>.

alized groups always benefit from schooling, we highlight the struggles faced by marginalized educated men to acquire work, political leverage and respect. The idea for this book first came from a conversation with a young man called Girish.³ At least twice a week, Girish would come round to our house in Awasth Vikas on his moped. Girish was the son of a Brahmin doctor who had moved from Nangal to a colony on the edge of Bijnor. Holding a BA degree, Girish sold pharmaceuticals for a private company but harbored dreams of capturing a government job. In these respects, he was quite similar to many richer young men in Nangal and Qaziwala. Sitting down during our conversations, Girish exuded a restless energy, his legs swaying from side to side as he spoke. On one occasion, Girish felt moved to comment on our project on schooling and inequality in western UP by noting that “education is nothing, what matters here now is *source* and *force*.”⁴ ‘*Source*’ referred to social contacts and ‘*force*’ connoted physical might or the combination of money and muscle. A few days later, and preoccupied with the same thought, Girish told us, “What I meant to say is that it is money and *jugār* that matter here.” In his Hindi/English dictionary, McGregor (1993: 376) translates *jugār* as ‘provisioning’ but in western UP it commonly refers to the capacity to improvise shrewdly with available resources.⁵ While we were living in Bijnor, Girish went for an interview for a position in the railway service. Reflecting the massive disparity between the demand for government jobs and supply of such positions, over a thousand people appeared for the handful of posts on offer. Each of these thousand people had the requisite educational qualifications. Girish remembered that “those with *jugār* got the jobs.”

What we now remember about that meeting with Girish, and what became increasingly clear to us as our research progressed, was the active and energetic

³Our overall research project focused on the relationship between rising secondary school education and the reproduction of class, caste, religious and gendered hierarchies.

⁴Where we italicize English words in documenting reported speech, this indicates that these are the precise words that our informants used rather than translations from Hindi.

⁵Throughout the book we have used McGregor’s (1993) dictionary for translating Hindi words.

manner in which young men in north India have responded to educated underemployment and the varied ways in which they discussed education. But the broader point we take from Girish is that education rarely acts as some irresistible force propelling young people toward secure employment and respectable futures. Rather, educated young people—in India as in many areas of the world—emerge from school or university into highly competitive fields of social struggle in which the utility and meaning of ‘education’ and ‘modernity’ emerge as problematic, and in which *source, force* and the need to improvise become paramount concerns.

This chapter seeks to provide a conceptual framework for understanding young people’s efforts to negotiate educated un/under-employment. We wish to locate the struggles of young men such as Girish with reference to key scholarly debates on education, youth cultures and social inequality. The next section of this chapter introduces Drèze and Sen’s theory of education as social opportunity. We then consider how a focus on youth cultures, the cultural politics of modernity and masculinity might offer additional insights into young men’s practices. Finally, we outline our methodology and the argument and structure of the book.

Sen, Education and Freedom

In collaborative research with Jean Drèze (Drèze and Sen 1995), Sen offers a counterpoint to mainstream development’s preoccupation with questions of economic growth and governance. Instead, Drèze and Sen propose that international development organizations and national governments in poor countries should pay much greater attention to improving education and health care. The authors advance their argument with reference to how the widespread provision of basic education may improve a country’s economic growth, using China as a key example, and by presenting a set of propositions about education’s connection to individual and collective well-being.

Drèze and Sen argue that elementary education (Classes 1 to 8) is valuable to the freedom of a person in five distinct ways. First, education has an intrinsic importance in that being educated has a value in itself. Second, education plays ‘instrumental personal roles’: “Education [is] important for getting a job

and more generally for making use of economic opportunities. The resulting expansion in incomes and economic means can, in turn, add to a person's freedom to achieve functionings that he or she values" (Drèze and Sen 1995: 14). Third, Drèze and Sen identify 'instrumental social roles' whereby education facilitates public discussion of social needs and encourages subordinate groups to make informed collective demands. Fourth, they refer to 'instrumental process roles,' understood as benefits aside from the explicitly educational function of schools, such as promoting social interaction and broadening young people's horizons. Finally, education is perceived to play empowerment and distributive roles: "Greater literacy and educational achievements of disadvantaged groups can increase their ability to resist oppression, to organize politically, and to get a fairer deal" (Drèze and Sen 1995: 14–15).

Drèze and Sen's ideas have powerfully shaped how scholars, practitioners and activists think about schooling in poor countries. As Sen (1999; chapter 12) explains in later work, they go beyond human capital approaches⁶ by insisting on close links between education and various *social* goods. Moreover, unlike human capital theorists, Drèze and Sen are sensitive to how unequal access to education frequently reproduces inequality within society, a point well made in a volume of regional case studies (Drèze and Sen 1997). Implicit in Sen's work is recognition of the multiple means through which people learn, for example through apprenticeships (Lave and Wenger 1991; Hameed 2005), labor (Bremman 1985; Parry 1999) or play (Katz 2004). Moreover, Drèze and Sen have made important empirical contributions to understanding how education works in India.

Nevertheless, a review of critical approaches to education suggests two principal difficulties with Drèze and Sen's (1995) and Sen's (1999) construction. A first problem with Sen's schema is one of emphasis. In laying repeated stress on the importance of schooling in and of itself, he risks downplaying how schooling is differently experienced. The notion that education is intrinsically benefi-

⁶Becker was instrumental in promoting the notion that 'human capital', comprised of skills and knowledge learnt in school, improves workers' productivity and generates economic growth. In the wake of this theoretical formulation, numerous studies emerged which purported to demonstrate the close connection between economic growth and people's possession of school knowledge (e.g. Heyneman 1980, 2003).

cial is now widely circulated by governments, non-state actors and local people. Yet these ideas have routinely been the subject of critique: from the radical 'deschoolers' (Illich 1972) to scholars who stress the role of formal education in creating 'failure' as a social label (Willis 1977; Levinson and Holland 1996). Others have pointed to how school education is implicated in the creation or perpetuation of national, religious, gendered, and class identities and beliefs (e.g. Althusser 1971; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Foucault 1980; Giroux 1983, 2001).⁷

The second problem relates to the social and political processes through which marginalized people obtain substantive freedoms. Sen is sometimes slow to explain clearly the mechanisms through which one freedom creates others. Moreover, where he has attempted to do so, other scholars have occasionally challenged his interpretation. Reflecting on the comparative position of China and India, for example, Corbridge (2002) has questioned the idea common in Sen's writing that democratic governments are inevitably more likely than authoritarian regimes to generate economic growth, improve welfare and provide food security for the poor. Corbridge argues that Sen fails to consider the Marxist arguments that democratic governments frequently side with dominant classes and that freedoms are often achieved through social struggle. In relation to schooling, Jeffery and Jeffery (1998) have used empirical work in UP, as well as secondary evidence from other parts of India, to question the notion that formal education within school inevitably improves women's autonomy and lowers fertility. Jeffery and Jeffery show that the correlation between low fertility and women's schooling does not demonstrate a causal link. Moreover, many schools in western UP reproduce highly exclusionary gendered norms. Parents characteristically send their daughters to school to groom them for their future role as wives and mothers and instill restrictive notions of femininity (see Jeffery and Basu 1996; Jeffery and Jeffery 1998; see also Agarwal et al. 2006).

The operative word in Drèze and Sen's theoretical schema is 'potential': education *can* improve people's access to multiple freedoms *if* other conditions permit. Questions of whether education is the most effective point of entry in processes of social empowerment and, crucially, what *other initiatives* might

⁷For a discussion of different generations of critical educational research, see Levinson and Holland (1996).

need to be taken in tandem with efforts to improve educational access become pressing. As Corbridge (2002) and Seabright (2001) have argued, the implications of Sen's work for policy are not always rendered explicit in his writing.

We are not arguing *against* efforts to expand the educational opportunities of the poor. There is an urgent need to support Drèze and Sen's call for improved school facilities within and outside India. A large number of young people in South Asia, especially girls, still lack access to primary, let alone secondary, education. These young people typically enter household labor or poorly paid manual, service or industrial work outside the home, often in grueling and dangerous conditions (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Dyson 2007). Drèze and Sen's arguments have an important strategic political value in the context of political resistance to improving government education and considerable state apathy around addressing the material and educational needs of working children. It should be equally clear that we do not subscribe to the type of 'post-development' theorizing that might imagine formal education as somehow 'inappropriate' to the strategies of rural north Indians. The example of Chandbir reminds us that many young people in rural India have absorbed notions of schooling as a form of development. Rather, we are concerned that Sen's theoretical emphasis on education as a driver for change might divert attention away from social struggles over the value and uses of education in situations of economic uncertainty. As an alternative strategy, we seek to uncover the importance of post-educational landscapes as *terrains of social and political struggle*. We use geographical terminology wittingly to signal our interest in how young people equipped with very different resources compete for work, security and respect *on the ground*.

Global Youth Cultures

Our attention to the politics of educated young people speaks not only to recent calls for greater attention to 'education in practice' (Chopra and Jeffery 2005) but also to nascent literatures on the changing nature of youth cultures in the face of neoliberalism (Nilan and Feixa 2006). Education has failed to open up expanded employment and other substantive freedoms for young people across large swathes of the world. Rising educational enrollment and

a decline in opportunities for salaried employment often have an especially marked impact upon the self-perception and cultural practices of young men, who frequently feel under intense pressure to 'cash in' on their education in the spheres of work and politics.⁸ The global spread of images of success based on prolonged participation in schooling and subsequent entry into professional or white-collar work has encouraged parents and young men to invest time, money and effort in extended formal schooling. In the global south especially, but also in many 'northern' contexts, widely different forms of neoliberal economic change have simultaneously undermined the opportunities for educated young men to obtain stable and well-paid work. Thus arises one of the most unsettling paradoxes of contemporary globalization: at almost the precise moment that an increasing number of people formerly excluded from mainstream schooling have come to recognize the empowering possibilities of education, many of the opportunities for these groups to benefit from schooling are disappearing.

'Neoliberal economic change' varies widely from place to place (e.g. Harvey 2005). In some areas, processes of economic restructuring have created new opportunities for secure employment, and rates of un/under-employment are quite low. Even where it has not, some young people in the global south are able to benefit from processes of economic restructuring (Bucholtz 2002). For example, in contemporary India there is a thin upper stratum of young people who acquire high quality education in elite institutions and move smoothly into secure salaried work, often within the professions or business. Contemporary concern in the West over the movement of jobs from Euro-America to India has provoked growing scholarly interest in this English-speaking upper class (Fernandes 2006), who are geographically concentrated in the largest cities in India and comprise a tiny fraction of the overall youth population. Recent research on these young people has shown how processes of global change are opening up new leisure spaces, consumption opportunities and 'identity possibilities' for this elite (Lukose 2005).

⁸This is not to deny the rising numbers of young women seeking paid employment, nor how widespread unemployment negatively affects young women in some parts of the world. Recent work shows that educated women seeking paid employment often suffer from a type of 'double subordination' in poor countries: as young people excluded by economic and political structures from secure salaried work, and as women seeking to challenge entrenched gendered ideas that restrict their access to paid employment outside the home (e.g. Miles 1998; Miles 2002).

Notwithstanding this evidence, the combination of people's expanding participation in school and collapsing opportunities for secure employment is creating mounting pressures on young men in a wide array of settings. Within India, Nieuwenhuys' (1994) study of unemployed secondary school matriculates in Kerala, Heuzé's (1996) research on employment markets in central India, and Parry's (2005) discussions of steelworkers in Chhattisgarh, all refer to the rising importance of a set of educated un/under-employed youths. Indeed, unemployment or underemployment is now a growing threat for even some of the most advantaged sections of the youth population in South Asia (Fernandes 2006), East Asia (Louie and Low 2005) and Latin America (Gutmann 1996). Moreover, educated un/under-employment is an increasing feature of many western countries (Brown 1995; Bourgois 1995; McDowell 2003).

Underemployment is often defined as dependence on involuntary part-time work, intermittent unemployment, and/or involvement in poorly remunerated labor (Prause and Dooley 1997: 245). In other cases, scholars use underemployment to denote the under-utilization of skills, especially educational capacities. Distinct from this search for key measures of underemployment, our interest is in understanding how young men themselves come to perceive themselves as 'underemployed' or 'unemployed.' We also examine how a person's social position shapes the process through which they define themselves as un/under-employed.

A central question in this context is how far educated un/under-employed young men are able to respond positively to their predicament. The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu bears centrally on this question of young people's agency. Bourdieu is often credited with having moved beyond Marxist treatments of class and capital by emphasizing the importance of social networks and cultural power in the perpetuation of social hierarchies (Calhoun 1993). These preoccupations with inequality and reproduction color his approach to studying unemployment; Bourdieu (1984) argued that educated un/under-employed young people in 1960s France had found creative means to negotiate their exclusion from secure salaried work, but in ways shaped by the financial resources they received from their parents, their social connections and the nature of the credentials they had acquired in school. Those among the educated un/under-employed from relatively wealthy backgrounds often possessed prestigious school qualifications and were well connected in urban

society. Capitalizing on their money, social resources and air of cultural accomplishment, these men managed to acquire reasonably secure, status-saving work. By contrast, poorer members of the educated un/under-employed lacked the money, connections and credentials required to find acceptable 'fallback employment,' and they often struggled to acquire even poorly paid, temporary, service-type occupations.

Bourdieu therefore imputes the educated un/under-employed with the capacity to respond actively to their predicament. He also provides a set of conceptual tools for understanding structures that shape young people's strategies. In particular, Bourdieu stresses the importance of cultural capital—the range of goods, titles and forms of demeanor that are 'misrecognized' as legitimate within arenas of power—and social capital, defined as instrumentally valuable social bonds, in young people's capacity to devise effective responses to economic exclusion. Individuals' chances of success within the 'field' of employment competition depended crucially on the volume and form of their economic, social and cultural capital. Bourdieu also directed attention toward how various types of capital are inculcated in people's 'habitus': orientations to action 'written in' to a person's movements, reflexes and tastes, and which are both structured by people's experience while also structuring future action. Bourdieu's practical application of the concept of habitus pointed to the ability of young people from dominant backgrounds to negotiate markets for prestigious qualifications and jobs with confidence and ease. Bourdieu dwelt on the elite's 'feel for the game,' or *sens de placement*, and a corresponding lack of social skill and spatial awareness among marginalized social groups.

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, social capital and habitus offer a valuable means of conceptualizing how structures may enable or constrain differently positioned young men in their quest to negotiate educated un/under-employment. Significantly, his attention to the social networks and symbolic practices through which dominance is reproduced and contested highlights how inequality is practiced in space (Reed-Danahay 2005). Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital also anticipates recent social science critiques of the term by attending to the role of the state and other forces in shaping social capital formation and examining the role of social connections in the reproduction of unequal relations of power (cf. Putnam 1993; Jeffrey 2001; Harriss 2002).

But Bourdieu's schema rather implies that—through their inferior habi-

tus—young people from subordinate groups will inevitably lose out to dominant classes and that they are incapable of meaningful social critique. In addition, as feminist critics have pointed out (Reay 1995), Bourdieu's work partially obscures the gendered character of cultural, social and economic capital accumulation. Moreover, Bourdieu implies that the competition for wealth, social contacts and cultural capital determines young people's strategies, and thereby downplays many other human goals, such as friendship and love (Dreyfuss and Rabinow 1992).⁹

Scholars associated with the UK's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)—the so-called 'Birmingham School'—sought to explore young people's agency more explicitly (e.g. Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1979). Established in 1963 at Birmingham University, CCCS developed a range of critical approaches to the analysis and interpretation of youth cultural practice which focused in particular on the styles of dress, speech and behavior—or 'youth subcultures'—employed by young men in public settings to challenge dominant notions of culture and propriety. CCCS scholars, particularly the sociologist Paul Willis, saw in culture a means for working class young people to counteract and reject powerful ideas within society. Drawing especially on Gramsci, Willis (1982: 112) stressed youth involvement in 'cultural production,' understood as people's efforts to deploy available symbolic resources in ways shaped by broader structural forces.¹⁰ More than Bourdieu, Willis was aware of the potential for young people's cultural production to change society. According to Willis, power struggles between unequal social actors are never predetermined, and subordinate groups often make significant gains in fields of struggle. Willis (1982) thus sought to distance himself from the suggestion implicit in much of Bourdieu's early work on habitus that people's embodied dispositions trap them into acting in certain pre-given ways. But Willis was nevertheless suspicious of the potential for young people to transform society. Building on the work of the French Marxist thinker, Althusser (1971), Willis suggested that, even where they try to resist dominant structures, young people's cultural produc-

⁹For alternative readings of Bourdieu's work, see Lane (2000), Bourdieu (2001), and Reed-Danahay (2005).

¹⁰Willis (1982: 112) defines cultural production as "the active, collective use and explorations of received symbolic, ideological and cultural resources to explain, make sense of and positively respond to 'inherited' structural and material conditions."

tions are always only 'partial penetrations' of those structures: critiques marked by the ideologies of the powerful.¹¹

The influence of the Birmingham School, and Willis in particular, is evident in many subsequent critical ethnographies of educated un/under-employment (e.g. Demerath 1999; Levinson 1999), and has also contributed to a new emphasis on agency and practice within broader geographies (Valentine et al. 1998) and anthropologies (Bucholtz 2002) of young people. At the same time, and informed by the work of Butler (1990), several new anthropologies of youth move beyond Willis and his peers by exposing how people's idea of themselves as subjects (their 'subjectivities') and of their own masculinity or femininity do not simply reflect an underlying 'self', 'identity' or 'habitus' and still less a particular class position. These studies stress instead how people's notions of themselves as men or women emerge out of how they speak, dress and comport themselves, and how these aspects of their style come together within 'performances.' It follows that, as far as identities cohere, they are always in motion, and liable to be unsettled by future rounds of performance. This provides fertile ground for exploring how young people 'orchestrate' discourses and practices to achieve a notion of selfhood (Levinson and Holland 1996), 'author' their lives (Demerath 2003; cf. Foucault 1988; Bakhtin 1986) or engage in forms of subversion, irony and play (Butler 1990; Katz 2004). As Yon (2000) points out, young people's senses of self emerging through practice may be partial, overlapping or contradictory.

There are parallels between these relatively new anthropologies of youth and accounts in the global north, where researchers have argued that young people's cultural performances are increasingly creative, flexible and mobile (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Scholars commonly claim that processes of neoliberal economic restructuring and the emergence of what Giddens (1991) calls 'disorganised capitalism' have blocked many of the familiar channels along which young people historically developed attachments, acquired employment

¹¹Hall (1985), a member of CCCS, criticized some CCCS scholars' over-reliance on the Althusserian idea that ideologies form an implacable force moving in a 'top-down' direction to inculcate in the minds of working class people ideas against their long-term interests. Hall stressed that power struggles between differently positioned social groups are never predetermined, but comprised of a fluid process of negotiation. Willis's notion of partial penetrations, and the general tone of his papers in the early 1980s, arguably anticipates Hall's critique.

and negotiated their transition to adulthood. Instead, young people in North America, Australasia and Western Europe are imagined to be negotiating landscapes of risk (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The burgeoning literature on youth and risk points to how young people's unstable cultural practices traverse and unsettle sociological boundaries of class, race, gender and ethnicity (e.g. Cieslki and Pollock 2002).

Insistence on the fluid and ambivalent construction of ideas of self in practice nevertheless tends to detract from the wider political economic issues at the heart of Bourdieu's and Willis's work. As Osella and Osella (2000) make clear in their ethnography of ex-untouchable mobility in south India, caste, class, age and other aspects of a person's social position powerfully influence how young people strategize after leaving school. Ferguson (1999) engages with this idea by focusing on the types of 'investment' required in sustaining what he terms 'cultural styles.' Because cultivating a style is expensive, financially and in terms of the time spent learning distinct modes of performance, people tend to make choices between competing stylistic options. Ferguson's analysis also shows how the resources people can command, which are a function of their position in relation to wider structures, influence people's choices about where and how to perform cultural styles. Ferguson's elaboration of the notion of cultural style therefore returns us to something close to Willis's theorization of cultural production, but differs in at least two ways. First, Ferguson, building on Butler, refuses to link cultural practice to underlying 'identities,' class-based or otherwise. Second, Ferguson's account differs from Willis's in stressing the importance of skills quite durably inscribed in bodies, movements and tastes within processes of cultural production. There are strong echoes here of Bourdieu's discussion of habitus. But Ferguson rejects Bourdieu's notion that embodied skills can be delimited from a person's social background and that people are to a large extent 'locked in' to particular forms of action by their habitus.

In sum, we find in Willis's ideas of cultural production a concept that emphasizes structure and agency in roughly equal measure, and, in particular, remains open to the *potential* of young people to respond inventively to educated un/under-employment, even in unpromising circumstances. Willis's work foregrounds the value of a culturally and organizationally inflected political

economy approach, one that refuses to reduce questions of cultural practice to the ineluctable working of global capitalism but remains sensitive to durable inequalities which constrain educated young people's 'substantive freedoms.' Drawing on Ferguson's and Bourdieu's work we nonetheless remain alive to weaknesses in Willis's notion of cultural production and to the possibility that ideas of cultural capital, social capital and habitus may also help explain the strategies and trajectories of the educated un/under-employed.

Styles of Appropriation

Emphasis on the fluid and highly unstable nature of young people's cultural performances also risks obscuring how powerful cultural ideas may lend a distinctive character to the stylistic choices and political strategies of young men. In particular, recent accounts of educated un/under-employment in the global south point to the key importance of notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' in young men's cultural styles. At almost the precise moment when scholars have come to critique concepts such as modern/traditional, urban/rural, developed/undeveloped as frameworks for academic thought, young people in situations of economic threat are often using these very categories to reflect on experiences, express aspirations, and signal social differences (Mosse 2003).

The contemporary salience of self-consciously 'anti-modern' or 'neotraditional' youth cultures exemplify this trend (Bucholtz 2002). In a wide variety of settings, young men have used a vision of 'tradition' or 'indigeneity' to rationalize poor occupational outcomes, inure themselves against the threat of exclusion or tap into alternative sources of respect, work and sociability. This possibility is rehearsed in Willis's (1977) classic ethnography of a West Midlands school in the UK. Willis described how working class 'lads' learnt through their everyday interactions with each other and their teachers to celebrate local traditions of manual labor above middle class jobs. The lads created a strong counter-culture of young male prowess by cherishing ideas of 'toughness' within their peer group, stigmatizing hard workers at school as 'sissy' and rebelling against school disciplining structures. The lads' cultural practices challenged school discourses that prized educational achievement as a route to 'modern' skilled or white-collar salaried work. At the same time, Willis shows that, in

valuing manual labor, the lads reproduced the gendered structures of authority that they had learnt in the home. Moreover, their 'rebellion' served to prevent any genuinely transformative politics; that young men came to value manual labor was extraordinarily convenient for the operation of global and national capitalisms in 1970s Britain, which depended on the supply of willing manual workers.

Willis's work is paralleled in certain respects by more recent ethnographies of young men, which also show how the underemployed may borrow and adapt from their own cultural background to create new youth styles. For example, in his analysis of Latino immigrants' 'search for respect' in Harlem, New York, Bourgois (1995), like Willis, describes how young men often respond to their exclusion from secure salaried employment by embedding themselves within macho cultures of resistance founded on a vision of 'tradition.' Bourgois describes how youth street culture among Puerto Rican men in Harlem builds on some 'modern' idioms, but he also highlights the importance of Puerto Rican styles imagined locally as traditional within oppositional practices. "If anything is extraordinary about the Puerto Rican experience, it is that Puerto Rican cultural forms have continued to expand and reinvent themselves in the lives of second- and third-generation immigrants around a consistent theme of dignity and autonomy" (1995: 11).

Recent research has also extended Willis's insights outside Europe and North America. Contrary to the expectation that youth in the global south are concerned with emulating 'The West' or regionally-articulated versions of 'the modern,' many recent ethnographies have shown how the educated un/underemployed may self-consciously oppose hegemonic visions of modernity. For example, Demerath (2003) has documented how, under conditions of intense competition for white-collar work in Papua New Guinea, young people contested the idea that formal education offers a route to upward mobility. He notes the rise among students of alternative discourses of education in which young people criticized those who succeed in school, whom they perceived as 'acting extra.' Elsewhere, Demerath (1999) argues that un/under-employed young men frequently re-evaluated the usefulness of their education in the face of a shortage of salaried work *after* prolonged successful engagement in formal schooling. Demerath describes educated young men who responded to a lack

of secure salaried work by returning to their rural homes where they engaged in subsistence livelihoods and sought to revive histories of rural community. Similarly, Levinson (1999) documents how many young men in urban Mexico had circumvented conditions of economic uncertainty by entering artisanal work and investing in community-based social networks or 'intimate cultures' of convivial relations imagined locally as 'indigenous.'

Demerath and Levinson therefore provide examples of how elements of a heritage or indigenous culture may be selectively appropriated and resignified as a response to demoralizing social change. Young men's use of traditional cultural resources *accords* with scholarly notions of modernity as a cognitive transformation—a greater self-consciousness about how one's life differs from the lives of people in the past (Giddens 1991)—even while it *diverges* from regionally hegemonic notions of modernity as a material process of change centered on acquisition of white-collar employment and expensive consumer goods. By demonstrating that they can be *modern*—in the sense of reflexively engaged in projects of self-making—without being *modernized*—in the sense of invested in Westernized styles of consumption and notions of school education as progress—the educated un/under-employed young men described by Demerath and Levinson are constructing what a number of anthropologists have called 'alternative modernities' (Appadurai 1996; Gaonkar 2001).

Dore's (1976) account of a 'diploma disease' putatively affecting the global south offers a rather different picture of the cultural practices of un/under-employed young men. Reviewing evidence from Japan, Sri Lanka and Kenya, Dore (1976: 231) argued that rather than "settling down to their fate in the traditional sector" young men typically responded to un/under-employment by obtaining more education or seeking temporary clerical work. Similarly, Bourdieu (1984) argued that educated young men in France in the 1960s and 1970s continued to place value on being 'modern educated' even in situations of prolonged un-employment.

The conclusions of Dore and Bourdieu resonate with a range of recent ethnographic accounts of youth cultures. For example, Weiss's (2002) analysis of neoliberal economic change in urban Tanzania focuses on the self-consciously 'modern' strategies of educated un/under-employed youth. Weiss argues that young men have responded to economic uncertainties by entering work within

the informal economy, especially businesses as barbershop owners. Weiss notes that many of the barbershops are named after the cities in Europe or North America that young men dream of visiting. By ironically indexing the distance between their ambitions and actual economic position, the barbershops have become symbols of young men's exclusion and modern ambitions: "their sense of expulsion and inadequacy is literally built into the urban landscape" (102). Cole's (2005) work on the cultural practices of young men in contemporary urban Madagascar offers further evidence of a tendency for marginalized urban men to re-establish respect by investing in locally-meaningful visions of 'the modern.' She describes how young men have responded to un/under-employment by adopting a fashionable urban style and cultivating relationships with richer young women, who have made money from transactional sex in the urban economy. Cole stresses young men's close attention to sustaining a cosmopolitan, urban and fashionable image in the competition to please and attract wealthy female partners.

It is therefore possible to distill from the available literature on educated un/under-employed young men two complex and internally heterogeneous 'sets' of stylistic strategies: a first in which young men seek to craft lives in opposition to regionally hegemonic visions of what it is to be 'modern' and by selectively appropriating 'traditional' symbols; and a second in which young men strive to present themselves as 'modern,' often but not inevitably by signaling their affiliation with 'the West.' Attempts to reject or rework locally salient ideas of the modern might be imagined then as forms of what Hirschman (1970) termed 'exit from' or 'loyalty to' locally diverse conceptions of modern development. At the same time, it is important not to overdraw the distinction between these two 'sets' of response, which are better understood as different emphases within cultural strategies subject to constant change rather than radical and fixed distinctions. As Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003) and Liechty (2004) point out, present-day bricoleurs draw on cultural resources that are coded locally as both 'modern' and 'traditional,' often at the same time. Nor should we fall into the trap of suggesting that different styles are laid out as 'choices' for young men. Young men's investments in particular styles are better understood as *appropriations*, a word which suggests creativity but also directs attention toward the influence of structural and ideological forces over contemporary youth.

Our review of styles of appropriation offers a framework within which to locate the arguments in this book. In particular, we can ask whether the dominant response of young men in Bijnor district to the vicissitudes of un/under-employment has been to reinvent symbolic forms coded as 'traditional'—which would suggest an affinity between our case study and the writing of Willis (1977), Demerath (1999)—*or* whether the main direction of young men's response has been toward embracing 'modern' identities, based for example on the purchase of newly available consumer goods and a belief in education, strategies that would bear a family resemblance to those pursued by the young men described by Weiss (2002) and Cole (2005).

Gendered Styles

What also emerges powerfully from recent ethnographies of educated un/under-employed young men in situations of economic threat is the central importance of gendered ideas in shaping young people's styles. Discussion of masculinities in the global south has lagged behind analysis of women's position. As Osella and Osella (2007: 7) point out in a review of the South Asian literature, men are present in South Asian ethnography but they are generally not the explicit object of study and the gendered nature of their behavior is rarely problematized. Moreover, where anthropologists have considered issues of masculinity in the South Asian literature, they have tended to present formal models of masculine behavior which were not analyzed as products of gender power (see Osella and Osella, 2007: 8–9 for a review).

Recent books on masculinities in Africa (Lindsay and Miescher 2003), Latin America (Gutmann 2003) and Asia (Chopra et al. 2004) move beyond cultural archetypes by focusing more explicitly on the historical construction of normative masculinities and the relationship between these ideal versions of manhood and 'masculinities in practice' (Gutmann 2003). Much of this research draws on the pioneering work of Connell (1987) on the relationship between distinct forms of masculinity. Connell emphasizes that masculinities are constructed differently in different cultures, and in different time periods as well as across a range of scales. Building on Connell's work, research in South Asia shows how men may align their practices to normative masculinities in certain

situations—such as the job interview or schoolroom—but privately act in ways that vary widely from idealized visions of manhood (Osella and Osella 2007).

Another important contribution of Connell's work has been to uncover how masculinities are ordered in relations of hierarchy and dominance, a theoretical move which opens up space for examining power relations among men. Connell suggested that specific types of dominant masculinity characterize gender regimes in particular regional and historical contexts. He then asserts that these 'hegemonic masculinities' are "constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (Connell 1987: 183, quoted in McDowell 2003: 11).

Connell insists that the relationship of specific men to notions of hegemonic or subordinate masculinity may change at particular 'crisis moments.' Emerging research on Indian young men offers examples of this process. For example, several commentators have written of a disappearance of male adolescence for the poor in India, where rapid economic change and new health threats propel many impoverished children directly into paid work and the demands of adult masculinity (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Verma and Saraswathi 2002). In these examples, young men are commonly forced to assume responsibilities in the home (Osella and Osella 2007: 40), while at the same time rationalizing and resisting their subordination within local masculine hierarchies.

But Connell's notion of 'crisis moments' can also be applied to an analysis of educated un/under-employed young men, whose experience of youth in India is often increasingly drawn out over time rather than compressed (Parry 2005). Educated un/under-employed young men characteristically occupy an ambivalent position with reference to hegemonic masculinities: they conform by dint of their education to certain visions of successful manhood while being unable to assume male breadwinner roles (Osella and Osella 2007). Some young men have reacted to this ambivalence and its attendant threats to their sense of gendered competence by engaging in forms of hyper-masculine performance or through violence. For example, Hansen (1996) describes how educated un/under-employed young men in Bombay in the early 1990s became involved in Hindu right-wing political organizations as a means to 'recuperate masculinities.' Other research, based primarily in Africa, has pointed to the 'feminization' of un/under-employed young men as a result of their movement into poorly paid 'women's occupations' (Agadjanian 2004; Cole 2005).